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THE HARVARD CONFERENCE OF ASTRONOMERS AND  
PHYSICISTS.

A full report of the second Annual Conference of Astronomers and Physicists, held at the Harvard College Observatory on August 18th, 19th, and 20th, is given by Professor M. B. SNYDER, in *Science* for October 7, 1898. From this account, and a shorter one in the *Astrophysical Journal* for October, the following notes have been taken.

The meetings were held in the drawing-room of Professor PICKERING's residence, and were presided over alternately by Professor J. R. EASTMAN, of the U. S. Naval Observatory, and Professor GEORGE E. HALE, Director of the Yerkes Observatory. Ninety-three persons were registered as attending the Conference. Very many interesting and important papers, touching upon nearly every line of astronomical work, were read and discussed. Abstracts of these may be found in Professor SNYDER's report and in the *Astrophysical Journal* for November.

Ample opportunity was afforded to examine the instruments and work of the Harvard College Observatory, the Blue Hill Meteorological Observatory, and other neighboring scientific institutions; and the meeting of the American Association in Boston, during the following week, added one more attraction for the visitors.

Aside from the scientific papers referred to, various matters of general interest were discussed by the Conference, the most important being the question of forming a permanent astronomical and astrophysical society. It was formally resolved that it was desirable to form such a society, and a committee, consisting of Professors HALE, COMSTOCK, PICKERING, NEWCOMB, and MORLEY, was appointed to report to the Conference on the subject. This committee subsequently presented the first draft of a constitution, and recommended that a meeting to effect a preliminary organization should be held on the Tuesday following.

The meeting was duly held, sixty-one persons having signified their wish to become charter members of the society. After a brief discussion, the same committee of five, with power to add four to its number, was appointed as the first council of the society. The duties of the council include the drafting of a constitution, the election of members to the society, arrangements for the next meeting, and similar matters.

A committee, consisting of Professors PICKERING, HALE, and

COMSTOCK, was appointed to consider the question of the proper organization and function of the U. S. Naval Observatory. The American Association for the Advancement of Science, at its meeting in Boston, appointed a committee, Professors PICKERING, MENDENHALL, and WOODWARD, for a similar purpose.

A committee was also appointed to co-operate with observers of the total solar eclipse of May 28, 1900, and to take such action as might be deemed necessary to secure the best results.

This committee, as finally named, consists of Professors NEWCOMB, BARNARD, CAMPBELL, and HALE, who have power to add to their number should this seem desirable.

#### HELIUM IN THE EARTH'S ATMOSPHERE.

Professors C. FRIEDLANDER and H. KAYSER have independently found helium in the atmosphere. E. C. C. BALY, in examining the spectrum of neon recently, identified six of the principal helium lines. Professor W. CROOKES states that in examining samples of the more volatile portions from liquid air, he had no difficulty in seeing the lines of helium in them.

From all these observations, it is evident that another constituent has been added to those previously known to exist in the Earth's atmosphere.

R. G. AITKEN.

#### THE TELESCOPE FOR THE PARIS EXHIBITION OF 1900.

M. GAUTIER is at work upon a monster refracting telescope, which is to be one of the attractions of the Paris Exhibition of 1900. From published statements, it appears that the aperture is to be 49.2 inches and the focal length 196 feet 10 inches. The estimated cost is 1,400,000 francs. The telescope is to be mounted in a fixed horizontal position, the light from celestial objects being reflected into it by a huge plane mirror.

#### A NEW *ALGOL* VARIABLE.

Mr. EDWIN F. SAWYER communicates to the Boston Scientific Society the particulars of a new *Algol* variable just discovered by him. The star is in *Ophiuchus*. It is B. D.  $+12^{\circ}.3557$ , the position of which (1900) is R. A.  $18^{\text{h}} 26^{\text{m}} 1^{\text{s}}$ , Decl.  $+12^{\text{h}} 32^{\text{m}} 36^{\text{s}}$ . The epoch of minimum is October 3.54233 G. M. T., and the period is  $21^{\text{h}} 21^{\text{m}}$ . The range of variation is from 7.0 to 7.5 magnitude.—*Science Observer, Special Circular No. 122, October 27, 1898.*